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ABSTRACT

Women who had been out of the educational system for some time and who had returned to a variety of college situations were interviewed in depth regarding their reasons for returning and the degree to which the colleges were meeting their needs as returning students. From the interview data, discussions with women's reentry program staff, and a review of the literature, a number of common problems and needs were identified and a questionnaire was designed to gather preliminary information on the status of women who return to school. A total of 124 women enrolled in women's reentry program classes at five community colleges in the Southern San Francisco Bay area were surveyed. Most of the women (64%) were married, in their thirties (the median age was 36.5), and had returned to school for intellectual stimulation or to receive job training. Significant differences were found in the areas of reasons for returning and income between women who were married and those who were heads of households. Almost all of the women felt that the reentry program was helpful in facilitating their return to school. Women were aware of some of the services their program offered, but not of important others, for example, financial aid. Future directions for research and policy implications of the data are discussed. The survey instrument and a bibliography are appended. (Author/MB)

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PROBLEMS AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF WOMEN REENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION

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FEBRUARY 1978

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ABSTRACT

THE STATUS OF WOMEN REENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE WOMEN'S REENTRY PROGRAMS IS CONSIDERED. WOMEN HAVE BEEN RETURNING TO SCHOOL AND TO THE WORKFORCE IN INCREASING NUMBERS. SPECIAL PROGRAMS ARE NOW OFFERED IN SOME COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO FACILITATE THE RETURN OF WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN OUT OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR SOME TIME. RETURNING WOMEN IN SEVERAL COLLEGE SITUATIONS WERE INTERVIEWED IN DEPTH REGARDING THEIR REASONS FOR RETURNING AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE COLLEGES WERE MEETING THEIR NEEDS AS RETURNING STUDENTS. FROM THE INTERVIEW DATA, DISCUSSIONS WITH WOMEN'S REENTRY PROGRAM STAFF, AND A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE, A QUESTIONNAIRE WAS DESIGNED TO GATHER PRELIMINARY INFORMATION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN WHO RETURN TO SCHOOL. 124 WOMEN ENROLLED IN WOMEN'S REENTRY PROGRAM CLASSES AT FIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE SOUTHERN SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA WERE SURVEYED. MOST OF THE WOMEN WERE MARRIED, IN THEIR THIRTIES, AND HAD RETURNED TO SCHOOL FOR INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION OR TO RECEIVE JOB TRAINING. SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES WERE FOUND IN THE AREAS OF REASONS FOR RETURNING AND INCOME BETWEEN WOMEN WHO WERE MARRIED AND THOSE WHO WERE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS. ALMOST ALL OF THE WOMEN FELT THAT THEIR REENTRY PROGRAM WAS HELPFUL IN THE RETURN TO SCHOOL. WOMEN WERE AWARE OF SOME OF THE SERVICES THEIR PROGRAM OFFERED, BUT NOT OF IMPORTANT OTHERS, FOR EXAMPLE, FINANCIAL AID. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF THE DATA ARE DISCUSSED.

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Introduction

The increase in the number of older women participating in higher education in recent years has been remarkable. Between 1960 and 1974, college enrollment of women ages 16 to 34 increased by 46% (Bureau of the Census, 1976). A large proportion of these women were past the conventional age for college classes; the number of women college students over the age of 30 just about doubled during this period (Gray, 1975). More precise statistics are difficult to come by, because the Bureau of the Census did not even bother to count college students over the age of 34 prior to 1972. Figures from that year indicate that, of the almost 800,000 adults over the age of 34 enrolled in college, 53% were women (Young, 1973). The number of adult students and the proportion of women within that group has been growing rapidly since that time.

It is clear that the return of older women to high school and college is just one aspect of an overall change in the way women live in our society. It is related to such social and economic trends as smaller families, longer life spans, increased leisure time, greater participation by women in the work force, redefinition of sex roles, and more female-headed households, all changes which have profound implications for the lifestyle of today's woman. For many women, getting back into the mainstream of education can be a critical part of their transition to the nontraditional, unfamiliar roles now expected of them.

Until relatively recently, few educational institutions dealt in a formal way with the student who had been away from

school for some time, and who often had family, work and personal pressures complicating her progress through an academic program. The primary mechanism for providing education for the returning woman student has been the Continuing Education for Women (CEW) program. CEW programs have historically been non-degree courses of study, serving almost exclusively the needs of the older, married woman whose homemaking and mothering duties have lessened, and who feels a need for intellectual and emotional stimulation.

However, CEW programs as they have existed are no longer enough. Although there are many CEW programs which are vigorous, imaginative, and useful to many older students, the woman described above is no longer (and probably never was) the only returning woman student in need of a special educational program. Many women are re-entering school with career or employment goals; their need for work outside the home may be due to death of spouse, divorce, a need for additional family income, or simply the desire to work. Some women who have always worked, especially at stereotypically female jobs, have re-entered college in order to obtain a degree or further training which they hope will open the door to higher paying, higher status jobs. Women who may not be interested in working have discovered that there can be intellectual gratification in meeting the challenge of a degree program, and prestige and comfort in possessing academic credentials. Many women who originally left school due to lack of funds are now able to return via the free or inexpensive programs provided by community colleges.

It is in the community college that we find the most aggressive efforts to deal with the educational needs of re-entry women. The community college, with its flexible scheduling, part-time options, career training programs, and community orientation, provides a very accessible, relatively unpressured educational opprtunity for anybody interested enough to pursue it. In recent years, formal programs for the re-entry student have been established in a number of these schools. The California community colleges in particular are in the forefront of educational institutions concerned with the re-entry woman. Their programs vary in the number and quality of services they are able to provide. The best have active recruitment in the community, special courses and counselors for re-entry students, child care, financial aid, realistic and non-sexist job counseling, and a strongly supportive atmosphere; in other schools, there may be just a single person, perhaps a teacher or a counselor, who will lend a sympathetic ear.

What exactly is happening in these community college re-entry programs? Some descriptive information can be found in the limited literature on the subject. For example, the Barry, et al. (1975) study included a survey of the administrators of the California community college system to determine the colleges' programmatic responses to the needs women re-entering the labor force have with regard to initial support systems, i.e., training, counseling, financial aid, learning assistance, etc. They found a disparity between the most frequently offered program elements (testing and academic counseling) and the most common problems of

re-entry women, as defined by the programs (lack of self-confidence, child care, financial aid). As a result of this and several other surveys, Barry, et al. recommended a regional women's re-entry center to aid women in their return to education and to the labor force.

A number of re-entry programs have compiled information on their own programs either for recruitment and outreach, or for the purpose of defending the program before the school administration. These reports are valuable sources of information on the kinds of students participating in these programs and on the services provided by the program or the college. They often include student surveys and recommendations, and analysis of the problems of re-entry women.

However, many questions about re-entry women and re-entry programs have not yet been answered fully or at all. Some of these questions are:

-- How do re-entry women define their problems and needs?
-- What leads women to re-enter formal education?
-- How do students hear about re-entry and continuing education programs?
-- What kinds of changes have occurred in these students' lives since returning to school? How are these changes related to the fact that they have re-entered school?
-- How satisfied are students with their school or program?
-- What are the communication networks within the re-entry program, and how well do they operate?

In this report we will try to develop a framework for answering these and other questions.

Purpose of the Study

Our preliminary investigation revealed very little information on re-entry women in college re-entry programs, which indicated to us a need for baseline data on this subject. Our purpose in conducting this study was to provide such information in the following areas:

-- the educational and career backgrounds and goals of women in re-entry programs;

-- their school experiences and school-related problems;

-- their sources of information and their unmet information needs;

-- their opinions as to how well their programs fulfill their personal growth and educational needs; and

-- their demographic characteristics.

In addition, we wanted to uncover the relationships, if any, which exist between certain variables, and to determine the frequency of occurrence of major demographic, opinion, and program-related variables. As communication researchers, we were particularly interested in the degree to which the women were informed about available services (including the re-entry program itself) which, in our view, would tend to facilitate their readjustment to school.

An additional purpose was to provide the participating programs with feedback on their students' perceptions of the problems and successes of their re-entry programs.

In our effort to discover as much as possible about the variety of problems, needs and opinions of re-entry women, we

employed four methods:

1. Background interviews with re-entry program staff and with other researchers and writers in this field;

2. A review of the literature related to returning women students;

3. Focused interviews with re-entry women in local colleges;

4. An "experience survey" (Selltiz, et al., 1976), intended to gain insights and ideas from people with experience with the situation under study, that is, the re-entry students enrolled in re-entry programs in community colleges.

The findings of the latter three are reviewed in the following pages.

Review of the Literature

Although a number of books and articles deal with the need for institutional mechanisms to provide for the counseling and education of women returning to higher education, there are few empirical studies of college re-entry programs and re-entry students. A review of the literature related to the re-entry phenomenon revealed the following major types of research:

1. Descriptions of the status of women in education;
2. Studies of adult education and information-seeking;
3. Comparisons between older students and students of traditional college age with regard to academic achievement;
4. Descriptions of special needs of older women students;
5. Evaluations of continuing education and re-entry programs;
6. Surveys of re-entry support services and organizational structures.

Each of these areas will be reviewed briefly below.

Women in Education

A growing number of books (e.g., Carnegie Commission, 1973; Change Magazine (eds.), 1975; Frazier and Sadker, 1973; Furniss and Graham (eds.), 1974; Rossi and Calderwood (eds.), 1973; Sexton, 1976) analyze the functions of education for women and the situation of women in the schools. They document the fact that women face obstacles at many points in higher education; women have been discouraged from academic and career achievement, discriminated against in admissions, presented with a curriculum largely defined by men, presented with few role models, and denied much of the

available financial aid. A major barrier is that the traditional years for college overlap the traditional years for beginning to raise a family, and, given a woman's usual duties to her family, it is difficult for her to take on full-time career and educational commitments at the expected time. The response of educational institutions to this "phasing out" has been simply to exclude large numbers of women from formal education. An alternative response, suggests Sexton (1976) is to redefine career lines and expected commitments to programs of study. This would enable people to work at home or to pursue their studies according to their personal timetables. Although this suggestion seems to be based on the assumption that most women will continue to take on family responsibilities at about the same age and in about the same way as in the past (a very questionable assumption, according to current marriage and employment statistics), it is an important one to consider in the restructuring of education to deal with the learning needs of both men and women.

The editors of Change, an educational journal, call the situation of women on campus, "The Unfinished Liberation" (1975), substantiating this title with articles on discrimination in education, the need for affirmative action, and the call for women's studies. Three of the articles (Durchholz and O'Connor; Hansot; Margolis) deal specifically with returning women students, using experiential and statistical data to describe the reasons women have for resuming their education in the face of a multitude of problems. (These articles will be discussed further in a later part of this section.) Their common conclusion is, simply,

that the increasing number of re-entry women is creating a force to be reckoned with. Janeway's introduction to the book notes that the growing population of returning students is not limited to women; she suggests that women "are responding to social change with exceptional sensitivity," and that their return to school in such numbers should sensitize educational institutions to the need for innovative ways to encourage the participation of older people in education.

One of the major themes of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education's report on women's educational opportunities (1973) is the need for ways for women to return to college after an absence of some years. The Commission makes specific recommendations supporting the development of external degree and part-time degree options, the provision of child care services, and the establishment of opprtunities for continuing education for adults. The decision to provide a special program or center for the re-entry woman is expected to vary according to the situation of the particular institution. The Commission speculates that the need for a separate program may be transitional, since special support services should not be necessary as the social and institutional barriers to the participation of older women in higher education are eliminated.

Adult Education and Information-Seeking

Sexton (1976) refers to re-entry and CEW programs as "only the fast-growing edge of an elaborate and long-established system of continuing education...and adult education" (p. 153). The

provision of opportunities for adult learning is a major tenet of our system of mass public education, and the concept of continuing or lifelong education appears in almost every field.

Although it began as an effort to reach those who had missed out on educational opportunities when they were of traditional high school or college age, adult education has been a largely middle class enterprise, directing its programs to the adult who already has experience with formal learning (Houle, in Hall, et al., 1974). Research in the 1960's found the typical adult student to be young (relative to the overall adult population), employed in professional or technical work, with prior experience in higher education (Parker and Paisley, 1966; Johnstone, 1964).

This picture has been changing, however. The increase in the number of nontraditional students who have gained access to higher education in recent years demands a new awareness on the part of the colleges. Efforts of adult educational systems to reach nontraditional students must not only be imaginative, but also be conscious of the special needs and circumstances of different groups of learners (see, for example, Carnegie Commission, 1971; Hall, 1974; Splaver, 1975). As Houle states, continuing education programs must deal with the fundamental problems of special groups realistically in order to attract adults with little formal education. This often requires a separate program for a particular group of students, although the program may be a stepping-stone to the mainstream rather than an end in itself.

The literature on adult education in general is too large

to treat in more detail here; we will confine our remaining comments to a brief description of two theoretical approaches which occur in the literature analyzing the returning woman student as a special type of adult learner. The models may be summarized as follows:

1. The life cycle model, in which individuals are assumed to have different needs during different stages in the life cycle. The usual pattern of a woman's life cycle is believed to result in the motivation and opportunity to go to college occurring in her late 30's, as the family responsibilities she is assumed to have lessen. This perspective tends to view women's participation in education almost entirely as a function of their family roles.

2. The adaptation model, in which individuals devise strategies consistent with their value systems, as changes in external circumstances (such as the economic situation) demand a response. In this model, women are returning to education in response to social change; the re-entry to higher education itself causes further change in areas such as family relationships and participation in the labor force.

We have found the second approach to be useful in our analysis of the situation of women re-entering higher education.

Academic Achievement and Persistence

Studies of achievement and persistence in college students consistently report notably higher achievement levels and lower drop-out rates for older students than for younger ones (Reimal, 1976; Richter and Whipple, 1972; Roelfs, 1975; Taines, 1975).

Older women are found to be more motivated and more serious than their younger classmates, in large part because of their maturity and life experience. A number of older women express their intention to make the most of the "second chance" they have been given to accomplish academic goals (Brandenburg, 1974).

The re-entry and continuing education programs studied here point with pride to the higher than average academic records and low drop-out rates of their students. Such statistics are often very useful in dealing with college administrators responsible for the financial health and continuation of a re-entry program.

Special Needs of Older Women Students

The data on the needs and problems of re-entry women come from two sources, surveys of returning women students, and case histories and impressionistic data from counselors, program staff, and re-entry women themselves; often, survey data and impressions are combined in one report. Durchholz and O'Connor (1975) surveyed 245 women on two campuses, and found that many had returned to school either in response to a need or desire for education or achievement (30.3%) or in search of personal growth (25.3%). However, the largest single reason given for re-entry was preparation for employment, a finding which appears again and again in most recent studies. Major problems reported were lack of career guidance, difficulty in getting a degree on a part-time basis, and lack of child care. The authors point out that another problem is probably obscured because their sample contained only women who were already in school, since women simply do not return to school in the first place if they experience a

severe lack of emotional or financial support from their families.

Astin's (1976) survey of women currently in CEW programs, alumnae of such programs, and the families of these women reveals much the same situation. The students in her survey face many obstacles: household responsibilities which are not or cannot be shared; lack of support from their families and other people important to them; lack of child care; inconvenient class times; and insufficient counseling regarding the practical concerns of coping with a college bureaucracy.

Astin supplies a profile of the typical CEW student. She is 36 years old, white, married to an executive or professional, with a middle class income and some previous experience with college (44% had at least a Bachelor's degree). This is somewhat different than the emerging picture of the student in a re-entry program, who often has little formal education and few financial resources. However, CEW students express much the same kind of needs as do the women in re-entry programs; despite their class, racial and experiential differences, CEW and re-entry students as women face many of the same obtacles in their return to education.

As a counseling psychologist involved with a student group consisting of re-entering women, Brandenburg (1974) conducted interviews and group discussions with women who had returned to school as regular undergraduates (rather than through a special program). Some of the women also completed a questionnaire on the practical and psychological problems they had experienced. Like Astin's students, most of the women in Brandenburg's group were married, in the "middle motherhood" period. Most had had

formal education beyond high school. They cited lack of confidence, increased stress, and family resistence to their being in school as major problems. In addition, they found that practical problems with irrelevant admissions procedures, child care and financial aid for part-time study were often overlooked by colleges structured to deal with younger students with different needs.

Roach (1976) also discusses the married, middle class woman in her late 30's who resumes a previously begun college education as her mothering responsibilities begin to lessen. She finds that older women undergo major changes in their lifestyles and interpersonal relationships as a result of their return to school, and suggests that adequate counseling in this area is very much needed. Both Brandenburg and Roach attribute many of the academic and psychological problems experienced by these women to the critical nature of the period of life they are in.

Gray's 1975 handbook for women returning to college draws many of its ideas from her survey of 41 low and moderate income women from seven San Francisco Bay Area colleges, and from her own experiences as a re-entry woman. She finds that the most troublesome area for these women is trying to integrate their home and school responsibilities. However, most of the women agreed that their return to school had had a positive effect on their family relationships. Other problems encountered were more tangible; lack of money, lack of child care, lack of emotional support and lack of appropriate counseling appear once again as most pressing problems.

The special problems of older women students are the focus of a questionnaire survey at Colorado State University (Kelman and Staley, 1974.) The respondents indicated that their highest priority need was child care for pre-school children. The disorientation and isolation of re-entry women were reflected in their desire for orientation at initial re-entry, social skills training, and social contact with peers. Assistance in vocational choice, vocational preparation, and job-search constituted another area where the students expressed need for additional services. Returning women students are seen by the authors as an expanding minority on campus whose problems should be dealt with by college administrators.

Richards (1976) surveyed women who had returned to school at Fresno City College after an interruption for employment or marriage. She typifies them as forming three groups: single women often with families to support and seeking a career; married women with children at home seeking a career or personal fulfillment; and older married women with fewer mothering responsibilities who are seeking personal enrichment. While each of the groups encountered somewhat different psychological and practical problems, Richards was able to extrapolate several important support services which would be of help to returning women students. She suggests expansion of financial aid opportunities; personal counseling; institutional commitment to women; and development of re-entry programs geared specifically to women.

Evaluations of CEW and Re-entry Programs

The evaluation research on programs for re-entering women students usually focuses on CEW programs. Campbell (1973) refers to two major evaluations of this type. In the first, Addis (1967) made nine site visits to CEW programs in order to study their administrative problems. She found the most serious problems to be lack of faculty support and uncertain finances; a program was able to succeed only with the wholehearted commitment of the college. In the second study, Raines (1969) evaluated the New York State Guidance Center for Women, and concluded that a network of adult guidance programs in state community colleges was needed.

Campbell addresses the question of whether or not it is necessary to provide special, separate programs for re-entry women. She believes that the policy of having a separate CEW or re-entry class or program appears to be based on the belief that returning women are afraid of their new situation and are unable to cope with too much academic freedom at once. However, there have been no findings which indicate that a special program is necessary. The observational and survey data do show a need for at least a support system or facilitating mechanism for expanding women's opprtunities in education.

Wells and Magruder (1972) emphasize the importance of evaluating the adequacy of current educational offerings. They note demographic and economic developments (such as women's increased life spans and changing patterns of living), forecasts of growing demand for skilled and educated workers, and demand by older women themselves for educational programs more responsive to their needs.

In an important article, Rice (1975) evaluates continuing education programs in general. She assesses the idea of special programs for older women by examining the assumptions upon which most such programs are based. In her analysis, the following are the premises upon which much of the present continuing education system is based:

(1) Women's education and employment patterns are discontinuous rather than continuous, because they are interrupted by family responsibilities.

(2) Women have special needs, based in large part on this discontinuity.

(3) Women have a preordained role within the family and the community, and they must balance achievement in school and in a career against accomodation to the needs of others.

(4) There is a need to provide transition mechanisms to serve women who are caught in the midst of great social change.

According to Rice, the changes in women's work patterns in recent years challenge the assumptions regarding the discontinuity of education and employment. As women are participating more in learning and working, with fewer and shorter interruptions, they will approach a continuous pattern, thus eliminating many of the circumstances of the re-entry students which now create the need for special programs. There will still be a temporary, remedial function for continuing education in facilitating the transition for women who have been involved in patterns of life which are now obsolete, but the perception of continuing education as a solution in itself is misguided.

Rice holds that the real need is for a preventative approach to continuing education. The development of a "shared-role" society should begin in grade school, with the exploration of sex roles, sexism, career awareness and individual potential, rather than depend totally on the remedial efforts (however useful they may be) of after-the-fact helping programs. Education should take place over an individual's life span, without forced interruptions, or distinctions between student and adult student.

Rice's most severe criticism of continuing education is its emphasis on adjustment to the way things are rather than on moving toward role equality and redefinition. The history of continuing education has been characterized by a concern with accomodation or adjustment to social norms. Rice concludes that continuing education programs run the risk of being panaceas rather than real solutions to the problem of role redefinition for women (and men) in a rapidly changing society. The alternative concept of education she presents is one which creates change and conflict with social definitions in the process of providing learning and working options throughout a person's lifespan.

Surveys of Program Offerings

Two surveys of women's re-entry program offerings provide information on California college programs. Byerly (1973) surveyed 178 colleges in the western U.S., and ascertained the level and type of educational opportunities for women in those schools. She found the schools to be sensitive to the needs of women students, but very constrained by financial limitations. She notes the importance of having a special program for re-entry women, since a

program of this type may serve as a welcome sign for returning students.

The Barry, et al. (1975) study is particularly relevant to the present research, as it supplies information on the schools in the California community college system. The authors surveyed college administrators to ascertain the programmatic response to the needs of women re-entering the labor force, with regard to initial and transitional support systems. Their report resulted in the recommendation that there be formed a regional women's re-entry center to aid women's re-entry to education and to the labor force.

In addition to the work described in the preceding pages, there is a rapidly growing body of "how-to" books, often written by women who have themselves experienced the problems and rewards of re-entry to education (e.g., Gray, 1974; Gray, 1975; Lenz and Schaevitz, 1977). These guidebooks provide information on college applications, financial aid, study hints, and other aspects of higher education.

"The Re-entering Woman: From Housewife to Career," reports on the proceedings of a hearing of the California State Legislature's Committee on Legal Equality in San Jose in March, 1974. Testimony was presented by a large number of persons concerned with women in transition from the home to the schools and the marketplace. As a result of that hearing, a study of re-entry programs was ordered (Barry, et al., 1975), and several pieces of legislation were passed, including one which removed the age limit (30 years old) from the California State Scholarship.

Definitions

In this study, we generally define a "re-entry woman" as any woman who is attending college after an absence from formal education of more than one year, when that absence was not planned as an official or temporary "leave of absence." This differs from one common concept of re-entry women as women over a certain age (usually 25 or 30) who are returning to college. As it happens, most re-entry women <u>are</u> over 25 and have been in college at one time. However, it is clear that the 18 year old who drops out of college and then returns at the age of 23 is also in a rather special situation. In addition, the California community college system does not require a high school diploma for admission. Consequently, there are often women, both over and under 25, who never completed high school, who are returning to formal education after a long absence.

In the survey phase, we narrowed the definition to include only those women who were participants in a re-entry program. In this way, we could operationally define a population of re-entry students that could be easily identified. For the purpose of the survey, the population consisted of the members of the class or classes required of newcomers to a re-entry program.*

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*This is a change from the original design. Our preliminary investigation had given us the impression that a student's connection with a re-entry program usually lasted in a more or less formal way for the duration of her studies. Further investigation revealed this impression to be inaccurate. In the colleges surveyed, the program was one to three semesters of required courses; the student's relationship with the program after this time was informal, although often very strong.

Focused Interviews

We interviewed seventeen women in five schools. (The method is described in Appendix A.) Eight of the women were currently enrolled in a re-entry program; four had been in a re-entry program when they first returned to school. The remaining five had never been in a re-entry program, although one of those five did attend a college where such a program existed.

The problems, opinions, and needs uncovered in the interviews were similar to those described in other studies of returning women students (for example, Astin, 1976; Barry, et al., 1975). The major points of the interviews are summarized below.

Previous educational experience

Two of the women interviewed had not completed high school. Two had high school degrees, but had never attended college. Thirteen of the women had attended college; of these, only three had completed more than one year. At least five had dropped out of school to get married or take care of a child. Two reported that they had quit college due to a lack of financial resources. The number of years they had been away from school before returning this time ranged from two and one-half years to twenty-nine years, with a mean of fifteen years.

Educational and career goals

With one exception, the interviewees all planned to finish the degree programs they were enrolled in; two had already completed their degrees, and four were in their final semester. One woman was not sure that she wanted to complete the degree program and then be done with school; she said she just may go

to school for the rest of her life.

Eleven of the women had a specific career or job goal. The others had no immediate job plans, but did intend to work eventually. Three of the women had no pressing economic need to work.

Reasons for returning to school

"I was tired of waiting for someone to do something for me."
"I felt I needed a degree as an equalizer, to be accepted; my husband felt superior because he had a degree."
"I'd thought about it for years."
"I decided to prepare for having to work when AFDC cuts me off [when youngest child is old enough for school]."

A number of the re-entry women (six) had wanted to return to school for a long time, but had had no special plans to do so until they learned of a special program in a college near their homes. Geographical proximity of the school and the re-entry services proved to be extremely important for all those interviewed.

The aggressive personal outreach of several of the colleges could be credited with the return of a least seven women who had been persuaded to enroll by the program staff or by friends or relatives in the program. A surprising finding was the number of women (four) who enrolled in a college because their children were enrolled there (sometimes actually in the re-entry program themselves), and had encouraged - or nagged - them to sign up for classes.

Problems

As shown in Table 1, the kinds of problems encountered by

TABLE 1

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY THE RE-ENTRY WOMEN

Type of Problem	Frequency
Financial difficulties	11
Lack of support from family, friends	7
Academic counseling problems	6
Feelings of inadequacy	5
Inadequate transportation	1
Difficulty in getting information	1
Conflict with home responsibilities	1
Guilt over time spent on school concerns	1
Lack of people to talk to	1

the women interviewed were both material and psychological. In most of these categories, the problems varied in intensity. Only one woman reported a problem that probably could not be lessened sufficiently for her to remain in school. The other students who indicated difficulties described them as being not quite severe enough to force them out of school, but still problematic. For example, several women who did not experience a total lack of support from family or friends indicated that the support they received was often limited. One woman said,"[My husband says,] 'You go to school on your own time, don't let it interfere with those other things [housekeeping, child care, socializing] that should come first.'" Another stated that her husband seemed bothered that she now had different expectations of him. A third woman reported that her family was somewhat resentful but usually

understanding of the new demands on her time. However, several of her friends were angry about the ways her return to school had affected their lives. A common feeling was that family and friends were supportive, but missed the "good old days" of having a wife/mother/friend cater to them.

Financial problems also varied in severity. One woman's husband had died shortly after she had started school, and she was experiencing extreme difficulty in getting information and help in a rapidly deteriorating financial situation. ("It's ten times harder for me to drag information out of people than it would be for a man.") Most students who expressed a concern with finances needed grants and work/study jobs in order to continue in school. Thus far, they had been able to obtain what they needed, usually through the re-entry program. Three women commented on the difficulty they had dealing with the personnel and the bureaucracy of the financial aids office; one admitted that she found it easier to be broke all the time than to deal with that office.

According to the students interviewed, the re-entry programs do provide remedies for many of the problems mentioned. For instance, all the re-entry programs offer at least one guidance or counseling class for all new students, and the re-entry staff are available for counseling, sympathy and support. Whether they were in a re-entry program or not, the women agreed that this kind of help from campus-based people is crucial.

The re-entry programs vary in their ability to help the students with more tangible problems, such as transportation or legal difficulties, but they are usually able at least to provide in-

formation about possible sources of assistance. It is interesting to note that none of the women considered child care a problem, although thirteen of them had children. However, the four women who had pre-school age children all stated that they would not be able to attend school were it not for the low-cost child care provided through their college or community.

Attitudes toward school

Attitudes toward the return to school itself were uniformly positive. All the women interviewed stated that it was a rewarding, challenging, and worthwhile experience:

> "Re-entry has been a fantastic opportunity; it's been hard but rewarding."
>
> "I feel like a different person, I feel good about myself for choosing to do what I want."
>
> "It's a whole new way of life for me, and one that I really enjoy. It's made me feel like I'm worthwhile and that I'm going to go someplace, and I will, I know I will, one way or another, I will."

All the students in the re-entry programs were pleased with the kind and degree of support they received from the program staff. ("Without them, we couldn't do it.") Students who were not enrolled in the re-entry program all expressed appreciation for what the program did, even when they themselves did not use its services much or at all. The re-entry women who did not have access to re-entry services or a similar program felt that their colleges had done an inadequate job of facilitating their

progress through school; none of them were negative about their school experience, but all felt that it could have been made much easier with some effort on the part of the college.

Demographic information

Of the women interviewed, seven were married, two were separated, six were divorced, and one was widowed. (One woman was not married at the time of the interview, but it was unclear whether she was single, divorced or widowed.) Three of the women had undergone changes in their marital status since returning to college; none of them attributed these changes to their re-entry to school.* These changes did, however, affect their reasons for remaining in school, primarily because of economic considerations resulting from the new marital status.

Most (thirteen) had children. The number of children in each family ranged from one to ten, with an average of three.

Age data are not available for some of the women. In those cases, age can be closely estimated from the year of high school graduation. The average age is approximately 36; the youngest woman was 24, the oldest, about 52. Twelve of the re-entry students were between the ages of 30 and 40.

* Two of the divorced women and one of the married women strongly disputed the notion that re-entry caused divorces.

Survey Findings

General background information

124 women enrolled in five community colleges in the Northern California area were surveyed. (See Appendix C.)

The median age of these students was 36.5 years; ages ranged from 21 to 60 years. Most of the women were married (64%). Divorced women accounted for 15% of the respondents, single women, 8%, and widows, 6%. Two-thirds of the women had between one and three children, while 14% had no children. About half the women had children under the age of six.

48% of the re-entry students said they had worked outside the home before they returned to school. The most frequently cited occupational category for this work was that of clerical and office worker, which includes bookkeeping and secretarial jobs. 23% of the women were working outside the home in addition to being in school; of these, 7% were working full-time.

Table 2 illustrates the fairly even distribution of income among the respondents in this survey.

TABLE 2

INCOME (thousands of dollars)	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
Less than 5	18%
5-10	14%
10-14	11%
14-20	17%
20-30	24%
More than 30	15%

The most important source of income for 61% of the women was the employment of their husband. 11% relied primarily on their own employment. Another 11% were receiving welfare or social security payments as their primary source of income.

With 30% of the women describing themselves as a head of household, it is interesting to compare their background information with the above. Nearly half (46%) of the heads of households were divorced, 19% single, 13% separated, and 16% widowed. Of the 10 single women in the sample, 7 considered themselves to be head of a household. 22% of the heads of household had no children, while 57% had one to three children. 35% were employed outside the home in addition to being in school; the primary income source for the heads of household was their own employment. 26% were receiving welfare, compared with 8% of the overall sample.

Respondents' mothers had a modal educational level of high school or less, while their fathers' level was eighth grade or less. 64% of the mothers had worked outside the home before the respondent was eighteen years old, and 7% of the mothers had been re-entry women themselves. 43% of the women described their mothers' primary occupation as housewife; the two most frequently cited occupational categories were secretary and teacher (both 8%). The occupations of the respondents' fathers were spread over a wide range, with the category of "manager" accounting for the greatest proportion of responses (8%).

Educational history and current educational status

The year of last enrollment in school for these women ranged from 1935 to 1976. 44% had last been in school between 1958 and

1969. The median number of years away from school was 17.5.

Table 3 , showing the prior educational level of the re-entering women, indicates that they were, for the most part, resuming their educational careers where they had left off.

TABLE 3

PRIOR EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
High school or less	39%
Technical or business school	13%
Less than one year of college	13%
2-4 years of college	27%
College degree	4%

85% of the women were officially participating in their school's re-entry program at the time they were surveyed. The rest of the respondents were re-entry women who were enrolled in a course required for the re-entry program without being enrolled in the program itself, or who were former students in the program who were still connected with it through work-study or peer counseling jobs. At the time they were surveyed, the women had been in school for at least one month; 86% had been back in school four months or less (the equivalent of one school quarter or semester).

Over half the women were carrying a full academic load of twelve or more units. 81% of those who had received grades had a grade point average of 3.0 (B) or better.

For those who had chosen a major, the three most popular were English (13%), Social Science (13%) and Business (11%). The most frequently given reason for choice of a major was interest

in the subject (59%), followed by need for the major in pursuing a career goal (10%), and past experience in the field (10%).

15% of the students were not pursuing a degree. Table 4 shows the breakdown of degree goals for those who were seeking a degree.

TABLE 4

DEGREE GOAL	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
Certificate of program completion	9%
Associate degree	26%
Bachelor's degree	30%
Graduate degree	17%

Over one third of the women might be described as aspiring to higher educational status than their spouse, their mother, or their father. 41% of the married women whose prior educational level was the same as or less than their husband's were now aiming for a higher degree. 38% of all respondents whose prior education was less than or equal to that of their mother had a higher degree goal than their mother's educational level. This was also true for 35% of the women with respect to their father.

The most frequently checked reason for returning to school was a desire for intellectual stimulation(79%) followed by wanting to prepare for a job (62%). Over half of the women were looking for contact with others or seeking a sense of identity. The women were free to check as many reasons as applied to their situation, and they cited a mean of 5.9 reasons.

Problems encountered in the return to school

The questionnaire included a checklist of possible problems that women returning to school might encounter. Only one problem on the list, rusty study skills, was checked by over half the respondents. Between 20% and 50% checked the following problems: family obligations, including housework and child care (47%); lack of self-confidence (34%); lack of energy or physical endurance (31%); lack of direction or purpose (27%); and lack of specific skills or abilities (23%). In addition, 23% checked at least one of the three items related to transportation problems. The least problematic issues (checked by fewer than 10% of the women) were: conflict with job responsibilities; inconvenient class times; cost of child care; negative experiences with instructors; negative experiences with re-entry program staff; and pregnancy. The way in which the problems reported seem to group themselves indicates that personal and family-related concerns are the most likely to present problems, while program structure and personnel do not create difficulties for most of the returning students.

"Problem level" was computed from the number of problems checked by a respondent. Based on the frequency of occurrence of the various responses, we considered a low problem level to be that of 0-2 problems, an average or medium level to be 3-4 problems, and a high level to be 5 problems or more. The average number of problems was 4; the average number for each school was approximately the same. 13% of the women did not check any of the listed problems, nor did they include any other problems in the space provided for that purpose. This problem level is much

lower than expected, given the assumption that re-entry women are confronted with many problems upon their return to school. One possible explanation for this low level is that the problems women encounter in their re-entering school are of a much different nature than those included in our checklist. However, we have little reason to believe this, since the list was generated from our literature review, background information, and interviews with women in most of the schools in our sample. In addition, the respondents could write in any difficulties they had experienced which were not on the list. None of the additional answers written in by the women differed greatly from items already on the checklist.

Another reason for this low problem level could be that the women in our sample actually had very few problems. Or, the problems they were encountering were being taken care of by either the support services provided by their re-entry program or by some other support system. To determine the factors related to problem level, we analyzed the relationships between problem level and a number of other variables.

We found that a woman's economic situation had an influence on the number of problems reported. Those women who had relatively few financial resources which could be applied to school-related needs tended to report much higher problem levels than those with more resources. For example, women in the lower income groupings ($9000 or less) were more likely than those in the higher groupings (more than $9000) to check five problems or more (Table 5).

TABLE 5

	Income (thousands of dollars)					
	under 5	5-9	9-14	14-20	20-30	over 30
% reporting high problem level	64%	53%	15%	30%	28%	21%

(chi square = 25.47, 10 degrees of freedom, significance = .005)

Married women, 91% of whom reported that their primary source of income was their husbands' employment, were much more likely (80%) to have an income level of $14000 or more than were those who were not married (12%). This income discrepancy may be a factor in the differing numbers of problems reported by women who were married and those who were not. 56-60% of the single, divorced and widowed women had high problem levels, as opposed to only 22% of the married women (chi square = 21.33, 12 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.05). 51% of the heads of household had high levels, compared to 29% of those who were not heads of households (chi square =55.82, 2 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.05).

In addition to having an economic advantage, the married women also enjoyed a very high level of support from their spouses. 79% of the married women said that their husbands were supportive of their return to school. Of these, only 25% had a high problem level, compared to 48% of those with either an unsupportive husband or no husband at all (chi square = 7.89, 2 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.02). Having a husband to provide financial and/or emotional support seems to keep the number of problems the re-entry woman encounters fairly low, and the fact that two-thirds of our

sample were married may be depressing the overall level of problems.

For the most part, the personal and emotional resources the re-entry women had to draw upon did not have any relationship to the number of problems they checked. These resources included support from family, friends and school associates, and friendships and sharing of problems with other students. There was no evidence that having a large network of supportive people was related to the number of problems a woman reported encountering.

There was an association between a high level of problems, and an indication of support from classmates (chi square = 7.67, 2 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.02) and from neighbors (chi square = 5.92, 2 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.05). One possible explanation for this unexpected finding may be that support from relatively casual acquaintances, such as classmates and neighbors, would not be expected or asked for under ordinary circumstances; only in the presence of an unusually great number of problems would their support or lack of support even be worthy of note.

For those currently in a re-entry program, there was an interesting trend in the relationship between problem level and the degree of awareness and use of the program's services. A new variable, service level, was computed, based on the student's knowledge and use of the services actually offered by her particular program. The median score on this measure was 14.071. Table 6 shows that, as the number of problems indicated by a student goes from low to high, the more likely it is that she knows about and uses the services provided by her program.

TABLE 6

Percentage of students at each problem level who are below and above the median in their awareness and use of re-entry program services

PROBLEM LEVEL	SERVICE LEVEL 14 or less	more than 14
Low	63%	37%
Medium	55%	45%
High	41%	59%

(chi square - 3.35, 2 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.10)

Further examination of the possible relationship between the re-entry student's knowledge of services and need for services should be considered in future research.

The Re-entry Experience

A number of questions dealt with particular experiences the women had encountered in their return to school and the impact some of these experiences had on their overall situation.

18% of the respondents stated that they were not friends with any other re-entry women. The median number of friends among other re-entry students was slightly more than four. 73% reported socializing between classes with other re-entry students, and 55% had coffee or lunch together. 32% shared transportation to school. It was noted earlier that friendships and sharing of resources with other re-entry students did not seem to reduce significantly the number of problems the women encountered in re-entering school.

58% of the 79 women who had taken a women's studies course had found it useful.

One section of the questionnaire asked women if they had experienced changes in certain areas of their lives related to their return to school. The areas were:

-- reasons for returning to school

-- career goals

-- feelings about themselves

-- feelings about how they relate to others

-- priorities in their use of time

The most notable change for our respondents was in the way they felt about themselves. 72% of the women said they now felt differently about themselves, and, for all but one woman, this new self-perception was in a positive direction. 70% of those indicating a positive change attributed it directly to their participation in a re-entry program or to the school environment. Many of the women experienced increased self-confidence and assertiveness, as well as a new sense of purpose and desire to contribute to society. One enthusiastic respondent wrote:

> "I have been able to look at myself as a valuable person outside of the home and feel I have something to offer society through my career choice [psychology of women] -- also much more to gain for myself....I finally realized that it is possible to have more than either/or choices. I can integrate a career and family to the betterment of all."

Other comments representative of how the women's feelings about themselves had changed were:

"I respect myself more."

"I feel happier and stronger as a person."

"I'm a person who's worth something."

"I like who I am and where I'm at most of the time."

46% of the women reported a change in their relationships with others since re-entering. Typically, they said they were now, "more relaxed, better able to communicate ideas," "more open and honest," or "more assertive about opinions, more tolerant of others." One woman wrote:

> "I listen to others' point of view. Feel open-minded and can accept others' points of view and feelings. In class, I heard new ideas expressed by people and instructors who were intelligent. Being exposed to educational stimulation opened my mind."

Some women (28%) felt that their reasons for being in school had changed. "At first it was just for fun, now I want to do something with the education," said a woman who had been self-supporting for ten years. A 52 year old widow, majoring in counseling and guidance, wrote, "I started back to school to have an outside interest after my husband's death. Now, I have set the goal of being trained to help others."

For 29% of the women, career goals had changed since returning to school. Said a former secretary:

> "As I adjusted to school and gained confidence and relaxed, I changed. I could see how women were treated in class and not always taken seriously. I grew and developed and took college very seriously. Now, more than ever, I want to earn my degree and 'get ahead' and have a good job in business. Now I want an MBA."

We asked if the women's priorities with regard to family responsibilities, housekeeping, community involvement, and social life had changed since their return to school. For most of the 59% responding that their priorities had changed, school work

had taken priority over an immaculate house, or the woman now felt that her own needs were more important than they had been in the past. "I've always put wife, mother, and volunteer in the forefront. Now I think of me also and everything has improved."

Overall, ninety women indicated that at least one of these aspects of their lives had changed. Only one out of the entire group felt that returning to school was related to negative changes in her life. For the rest, increased self-confidence, assertiveness, and tolerance for others' opinions were considered to be positive changes, as were more focused educational and career goals, and perception of their own needs as being important.

Most of the students who were in a re-entry program were very satisfied with it, with 79% checking either 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5, to indicate a high level of satisfaction. Those who said that the re-entry program staff had been supportive were more likely to say that they were satisfied (97%) than those who did not experience support from the staff (71%) (chi square = 8.64, 2 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.05). Having supportive classmates also increased the likelihood that a student would be satisfied with her program.

There was some evidence (Table 7) that a student's satisfaction with her program may be related to the degree of her awareness and use of its services.

TABLE 7

SATISFACTION

SERVICE LEVEL	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied
Low (14 or less)	9%	21%	70%
High (more than 14)	4%	8%	88%

(chi square = 5.11, 2 degrees of freedom, significance = 0.10)

19% of the women enrolled in a re-entry program indicated that they had considered dropping out of the program, the major reasons for this being unmet needs (40%) and personal problems (20%). There was no relationship between a woman's considering dropping out and her income level. However, 21% of the respondents reported that they were very concerned about having enough money to complete their education. Not surprisingly, 80% of those who reported such concern had incomes of $9000 or less. Only 20% of those who were fairly certain of their ability to complete their education were in the lower two income brackets (chi square = 32.88, 1 degree of freedom, significance = 0.005).

Information Needs

The survey dealt with knowledge about the re-entry program in two areas, pre-enrollment sources of information, and awareness of specific services offered by the program. With regard to the first of these, the women were asked to check all the ways they had heard of the re-entry program, and to indicate the one source which was most important in their decision to enroll. Word of mouth (from persons other than the re-entry staff or college personnel) was the most frequently cited source of information (40%). Next most frequently mentioned was the newspaper (37%), followed by personal contact with the program staff (33%). Each of these three was chosen by approximately 20% of the women as the single most important source of information in their decision to enroll.

A student was considered to have information about particular services if she knew whether the service was offered by her program and/or actually used it. Several categories of services which were

offered by only one or two schools received very high ratings because they were not checked by most of the students at the schools which did not offer them. These categories included: car pool arranging service (90% of the women had information on this service); college credit for life experiences (83%) and child care (80%). It would appear from the pattern of responses, however, that these were not "correct" responses as often as they were non-responses which were accidentally appropriate in the situation in which the service was not being offered by that student's school.

Among the services which were offered by most or all of the schools, the following ranked the highest:

TABLE 8

RE-ENTRY PROGRAM SERVICES	% OF STUDENTS AWARE OF SERVICE
Women's Re-entry Program office	77%
Re-entry program staff counselor	76%
College counselor for re-entry women	73%
Pre-admission counseling	71%
Information Center	68%
Academic counseling	65%
Orientation class	60%

None of the services were used by more than half the students in the re-entry programs. The most used services were:

TABLE 9

RE-ENTRY PROGRAM SERVICES	% OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE USED SERVICE
Women's Re-entry Program Office	47%
Staff counselor for re-entry women	40%
Pre-admission counseling	37%
Information Center	36%
Orientation class	33%

All the services listed in Tables 8 and 9 are part of the student's initial experience with the re-entry program, and as such, are the most likely to be encountered by the first quarter or semester student whom we chose to sample. A look at the type of services which were not recognized or used by many students points to the possibility that many students did not notice or learn of services until they needed specific assistance. For example, 73% of the re-entry women did not know about their program's college and university placement services, and 60% were unaware that job placement was offered. This may be due to the fact that few of the women in our sample were close enough to completing the program to need placement services.

53% did not know that their program provided financial aid counseling, and 56% did not know that financial aid for qualifying students was available. It should be noted here that 39% of those in a re-entry program who indicated that finances had been a problem in their return to school were not aware that their program provided financial aid counseling.

55% were not aware that their program would refer them to a learning center or to a class that would enable them to upgrade their skills; 48% did not know that a refresher course in study skills was offered. This is interesting in light of the large number of women who indicated that rusty study skills (58% of all respondents) and lack of specific skills (23%) had been a problem in their return to school.

Summary

Satisfaction with the re-entry programs was quite high. There was a tendency for satisfaction to be related to awareness of the programs' services. The women were most aware of and used those services which they would typically encounter as a new reentering student. Some areas where they appeared not to be getting needed information were financial aid and study skills assistance, when these were, for many, problematic aspects of their re-entry experience.

Our respondents seemed to have fewer problems than we expected. Women who could not count on the emotional and financial support of a spouse seemed to have more problems.

Most of the women were married, living on average incomes, with children and with some prior work experience. They returned to school to find intellectual enrichment and to prepare for employment. For most, they were picking up where they had left off their education at an earlier time.

As was found in earlier studies, our respondents had a higher than average G.P.A. (3.0 or better). Many were pursuing majors (English, Social Science, and Business) where a high proportion of women is traditional.

These students were enthusiastic about themselves, their goals, and the educational experience. Many felt a new, positive sense of self as a result of going back to school. Overall, the women in our study are seeking to expand their options in society, and generally consider themselves to be very successful at this.

Discussion and Recommendations

As exploratory research, this study must deal with the following two questions:

1. What have we learned about women in re-entry programs and about re-entry women in general?

2. What issues are raised which call for further research or for policy decision on the matter?

The interview and survey results describe in some detail the characteristics of the women in our sample. It is clear that women from a wide range of backgrounds, in many different "stages" of life, are participating in these community college programs. A necessary next step for researchers is to obtain parametric data on a random sample of the population of women re-entering the educational system so that more reliable generalizations about this group of students can be made. In addition, a sample of re-entry women should be compared with a matched sample of women who are not in school, in order to identify factors which might predict whether or not a woman is likely to return to school. This type of study would have implications for college administrators looking for better ways to reach potential students; for policy makers interested in trends in the use of the educational system; and for those concerned with the status of women in contemporary society.

Given the increasing number of adult women students, with their disparate backgrounds, problems, and goals, how well are the re-entry programs dealing with their needs?

In terms of their stated objectives, the re-entry programs studied appear to be very successful. The major objectives of all the programs in this survey are:

1. To help the returning woman student (especially the older student) deal with the special problems she is presumed to have in re-entering school; and

2. To provide a supportive atmosphere in which the re-entry woman can assess her abilities and goals, and plan for the future.

A third objective (usually specific to federally funded WREPs, Women's Re-entry to Education Programs) is to provide disadvantaged women with the skills they need to enter into careers. This is very often an implicit goal of other re-entry programs, or a special concern of program personnel, but it is not always so stated.

All the schools are meeting these objectives to some extent by virtue of the kind and number of services they offer. Each program provides academic guidance, flexible scheduling, information services, personal counseling, and a special orientation to school and studying. A supportive environment can be found in the special re-entry classes, or the re-entry program office or women's center.

We saw in the interviews and in the responses to our open-ended questions about personal changes since returning to school that the existence of helping services and a supportive group is considered by the students to have eliminated many problems and made it easier to deal with the rest. And it does happen that the problem level of our sample is unexpectedly low. A

look at the surveys of returning women at schools which have no re-entry programs shows that they seem to have many more problems, to be more isolated from others in the same situation, and to feel a lack of support, compared to the women in our survey. This raises the possibility that the mere existence of a re-entry program reduces the number of problems encountered by the returning woman. Controlled comparisons of the two groups need to be made in order to validate the impression that re-entry programs are making a substantial difference in the ease with which women make the transition back into higher education.

Most of the women indicated a great deal of satisfaction with their programs. They reported feeling happier or more comfortable with themselves as people, and, in many cases, attributed this directly to the support and assistance they had received from their re-entry programs. Many women claimed that, prior to their return to higher education, their lives had held only limited options. Regardless of their reasons for re-entering, they saw the institutionalized support system of a re-entry program as crucial in helping them expand their personal horizons. Enthusiasm for the programs was extremely high; dropout rates were low. The programs seem to be one answer to special needs which, without a doubt, exist, and which are not taken care of by other mechanisms.

The self-selection factor in our respondents is obvious since they are all still participating in their re-entry

programs. This necessarily creates gaps in our understanding of student needs that the programs don't adequately fill. A survey of women who dropped out of the programs, focusing on why they left, would help to illuminate some of the programs' problems. Alternatively, it might determine that most of the dropouts left for reasons unrelated to the program and that the programs are basically meeting the needs of their students.

Are separate programs for re-entry women the only way to deal with the special needs of this group of adult students? What assumptions are being made about the nature of their problems and the best way to deal with them? And are these problems ones with which researchers and policy makers should be concerned?

A common assumption found in the CEW literature and in the philosophy of some CEW and re-entry programs is one which seems to be changing rapidly. It is based on the premise that women's primary commitment is to house work and family life and that their education and career goals are quite secondary. On the contrary, today's returning women are very goal-directed and likely to have a definite purpose for their return to education.

As dual-career families and female heads of households become more common, the description of "typical" re-entering women changes. This compels a reexamination of the paradigm concerning adult women in educational settings. Research

which would monitor, on an on-going basis, the situation of adult women returning to the educational system, especially as it relates to their status in society, would be of use in following future trends.

Another assumption on which the re-entry programs operate pertains to the re-entry student's need for adjustment to the college situation and to the student role. The re-entry program is intended to be a stepping stone to the mainstream of college life; this intention is demonstrated by the fact that official enrollment in the program only lasts for a limited number of semesters or quarters. While we have no reason to suspect it is happening, the possibility exists, and should be investigated, that the program would become an end in itself or would make it more difficult for the student to become integrated into the mainstream. This is another area where controlled comparisons between returning women who are in a re-entry program and those who are not would prove insightful.

A third assumption is that the function of the re-entry program is to facilitate the adaptation of the returning student to educational and economic realities beyond the college environment. Historically, many CEW and re-entry programs have fallen into the trap,described by Rice (1975), of concentrating on a woman's adjustment to social expectations, rather than creating an opportunity for her to redefine her role in a rapidly changing society. With so many of the women returning in order to improve their employment potential, career counseling

is an area especially vulnerable to this trap. Most of our respondents chose academic majors which traditionally are considered women's subjects, and which have few employment possibilities. It should be a research matter of high priority to determine the relationships between women's career aspirations and their participation in a re-entry program.

On the basis of our review of the topic and the data from our interviews and survey, we are inclined to believe that an adaptation model of information seeking behavior is useful in an analysis of the situation of women re-entering school. As external circumstances change, a woman determines that returning to higher education is an appropriate strategy; the re-entry experience then causes further change in her attitudes and behavior. We are able to see many of these changes in the interviews and the responses to the open-ended questions of the survey. The above description of the model is obviously sketchy; development of its details and testing of its implications is a matter for future research.

Further research is also necessary on the role of educational institutions in the lives of adult women, a larger subject of which re-entry to education is only one facet. Re-entry programs are important so long as the social, psychological and financial barriers to women's participation in education remain. As women move toward a more equitable situation in educational institutions, we anticipate that many of the present components of re-entry programs will be integrated into their colleges' structures, or will disappear because they have become unnecessary.

Our study indicates that community college re-entry programs serve a much needed function for women returning to higher education. We are convinced that, at this point in time, they should exist, and should receive a strong financial and institutional commitment from their college administrations. For the most part, the programs we studied had few problems which could not be solved almost immediately with a bigger budget and/or more staff. We are preparing "mini-reports", to be submitted to each of the schools, which will contain the survey information relevant to each particular school.

Students seemed to be well informed about services which were immediately obvious to the new student (such as a program office, or academic counseling), but had little awareness of of other areas in which the program could help them. Of special concern is the finding that not all the students who needed financial assistance were aware of the resources or referrals available from their programs. Outreach to the students enrolled in the program should be (and is, in our schools) a high priority, but it is difficult to manage when only one or two people are carrying the entire counseling, administrative, referral and trouble-shooting load. College administrations need to recognize the extreme need for more full-time staff with a primary commitment to the re-entry program.

It probably came as no surprise to the staff of the programs sampled that word-of-mouth was found to be the most common means by which women found out about the programs. We are not able

to establish that the efforts of the students and staff already in the program cause women to return; however, many of the respondents attributed their return to school to having had people in the program come to them and encourage them. We believe that the intensive, interpersonal efforts already underway at several of the schools should continue, and that schools with no such recruitment strategy begin to direct some of their resources to word-of-mouth methods. Mass media efforts, especially newspaper advertisements and press releases, are certainly effective, but they should not be at the expense of the personal phone call or the speech to the League of Women Voters.

Finally, there are a number of recommendations which come from the students themselves. For the most part, they believe that what the program offers is good, but that more of everything would be better. They want a larger office area for studying and socializing, more counseling on how to upgrade skills, expansion of the program to include courses in more fields, and more publicity about available programs and courses. A number of women requested more stress on re-entry to education rather than on job and career concerns, while another group asked for more counseling on re-entering the job market and less emphasis on academic matters. One possible solution to this impasse was suggested by several students, who proposed grouping students in the re-entry class together on the basis of similar needs and goals. This would add to the flexibility of the program, and enable it to deal with certain common problems more thoroughly. If the schools wished to put the students into separate sections in this way, it would be imperative that they exercise caution so as not to isolate groups of women or to define their needs for them.

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APPENDIX A

Phase I Interviews with Re-entry Women - Method

We interviewed 17 re-entry women from four community colleges and one university. Three of the community colleges have Women's Re-entry Programs. One community college has a Women's Center and a Women's Studies Program as well as an active Continuing Education for Women Center; as of Fall 1977, it has a "Women in College" program for new and returning women students. The university has no program or support service beyond a special part time option for older students. By interviewing women in several types of re-entry situations, we hoped to identify problems and needs that cut across different kinds of academic and personal support systems.

Volunteers at the five schools were purposively sampled in order to obtain representativeness across the two dimensions of "previous level of education " and "length of time as a re-entry student." The length of time as re-entry student varied from one month to three years of college; previous level of education varied from eleventh grade to three years of college. As expected, the selection of students on these variables resulted in our obtaining a great variety of demographic and experiential data.

The interviews were loosely structured around our research questions, so that the women could discuss their personal concerns and needs while, at the same time, they provided us with information on topics we considered relevant to the study (based on our review of the literature and interviews with staff

people and teachers). Using a written set of guidelines, we explored the following topics with the women who were interviewed:

-- Personal history (education; employment; family);
-- Life goals and planning (reasons for returning to school; educational goals; career expectations; personal aspirations);
-- Problems encountered in returning to school (attitudes of important others; ease of adaptation to school routine; continuing problems that can or cannot be solved through utilization of college or re-entry program support services; barriers to the achievement of educational, personal or career goals);
-- Attitudes toward the re-entry program (initial contact with the program; availability of information about and accessibility of educational and non-educational services; usefulness of career counseling and guidance; extent to which the program meets the woman's personal needs; suggested changes or improvements in the program); and
-- Orientation towards "the public sphere" (prior and current participation in social and political organizations; changes in level of involvement which are related to the return to college).

The tapes of the interviews were content-analyzed, according to the coding sheets shown in the following pages. The results were compiled for use in the writing of the questionnaire.

Appendix B

Interviews with Re-entry Women

School, ID _____

I. Personal History

A. Education

1. Last enrollment in school _____

2. Reason(s) for quitting school _____

_____

3. School attended _____

4. Other _____

B. Employment

1. Current occupation _____

2. Previous occupation _____

3. Self-supporting? _____

4. Other _____

C. Personal

1. Marital status _____

2. Number of children _____

3. Other _____

II. Goals and Life Planning

A. Education

1. Reasons for returning to school _____

_____

2. Plans beyond WREP course or courses _____

_____

B. Employment

1. Career plans _____

School, ID _____

II. Goals and Life Planning

C. Personal _____

D. Other _____

IV. Problems

A. Program structure (course requirements, scheduling) _____

_____

B. Financial _____

C. Guidance _____

D. Academic (rusty study skills, difficulty of courses _____

_____

E. Family/Personal _____

_____

F. Other _____

V. Attitudes Toward School/WREP

A. Involvement

1. Degree of interaction with other students _____

_____

2. Sense of belonging in school/WREP _____

B. Satisfaction with school

1. Degree of satisfaction with school/WREP _____

_____

2. Considered dropping out? _____ If yes, why? _____

_____

C. Suggestions _____

_____

D. Other _____

School, ID _____

VI. Orientation Toward Public Sphere

A. Participation in extracurricular activities _____

_____

B. Involvement in women's movement _____

C. Priorities _____

D. Other _____

VII. Comments

APPENDIX C

Phase II Questionnaires - Method

The sample for our questionnaire consisted of the members of the re-entry classes in five community colleges in the Bay Area and West Central California. These colleges were selected because of their proximity to Stanford and because they represented some degree of variation along the dimensions of size, degree of urbanness, accessibility of other public college programs, and length of program.

193 questionnaires were distributed in class to the students in the current re-entry class. In addition, questionnaires were given to the students in each school who were affiliated with the program but were not in the re-entry class. (These students usually considered themselves to be in the re-entry program even though they had completed the program's required courses.) The questionnaires were administered at two different times, at the end of the spring quarter or semester, and at the beginning of the fall quarter or semester. In this way, we were able to obtain data from students who had very recently re-entered school, students who had nearly completed the re-entry course or courses, and students who had already completed the re-entry program.

Our aim was to achieve a census of all students in a re-entry class at a given time. Due to constraints such as absenteeism, conflict with other class time, and lack of time to finish the questionnaire during class time, we obtained an overall response rate of 64%. Our study was conducted with a non-probability sample, which resulted in certain limitations on the generalizability

of our descriptive and correlational results. The most serious limitations are:

1. We do not have a statistically valid estimate of the characteristics of the population of all students in re-entry programs;

2. We are not able to estimate the degree of deviation from the population for our correlational data;

3. The systemmatic study of re-entry women and re-entry programs cannot end with an analysis of this sample.

However, we are convinced that for purposes of exploratory research, the use of a non-probability sampling method has resulted in many insights into the range of possible experiences of re-entry students. Although we are unable to determine for certain whether or not the relationships we have discovered are ones which could be expected in the actual population, we can hypothesize reasons why such relationships might exist, and can look to them for suggestions for further research.

APPENDIX D

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

This questionnaire is directed to women who are re-entering education, especially those of you who are returning through women's re-entry programs. What kinds of problems are you encountering? What kinds of information do you need in order to survive in college? Is your school providing you with enough information and assistance? We think the answers to these and other questions will be useful in describing the experiences of re-entry women as a group and in providing your school with ideas on how best to serve women who are returning to college.

All individual answers to these questions will be anonymous and confidential. The answers from all the questionnaires will be grouped together and analyzed, and a copy of the final report will be given to the Women's Re-entry Program at your school.

If you would like to know more about our project and about the results of this survey, our address is C/O Institute for Communication Research, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305. Thank you very much for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Kay Magill and Kathy Cirksena

PART 1

THIS SECTION DEALS WITH YOUR EDUCATIONAL HISTORY AND EXPERIENCES.

1. What was the highest level of education you had completed before entering college this time?

Eighth grade or less _____ Less than one year of college _____

Some high school _____ 1-2 years of college _____

High school diploma _____ 3-4 years of college _____

Technical or business school ____ College degree _____

2. Prior to your current enrollment, when did you last attend school full-time? 19__

3. How many quarter or semester units do you usually carry? _____

4. What is your major? (If you do not have a major yet, what do you expect to major in?) _____

5. Why did you choose this major? _____

_____

_____

6. What are your degree plans?

None _____
Certificate of program completion _____
A.A. degree _____
Bachelor's degree _____
Graduate or professional degree ____

7. What is your grade point average? (Check the closest one)

A _____
B _____
C _____
Below C _____
I have received no grades _____
I'm not sure _____

8. Which of the following were reasons for your deciding to re-enter school? (Please check ALL that apply)

I wanted to prepare for a job. _____

I needed a college degree to advance in my job. _____

I wanted to make contact with other people. _____

I was looking for a sense of identity. _____

I wanted intellectual stimulation. _____

I wanted skills to become more effective in my family or community _____

I was dissatisfied with my job. _____

I was bored at home. _____

My home responsibilities had lessened. _____

I had family or marital problems (including divorce.) _____

My responsibilities had changed because of a serious illness or death in my family. _____

I heard about the program's offerings. _____

I received financial assistance to go back to school. _____

Other people recommended that I go back to school. _____

Other _____

9. Which of the following people have been supportive of your decision to return to school?

No one _____
Husband _____
Children _____
Mother _____
Father _____
Sisters and/or brothers _____
Other relatives _____
Other _____

Women friends _____
Men friends _____
Employer _____
Faculty _____
Program Staff _____
Classmates _____
Neighbors _____

10. Have any of the following been problems for you since re-entering school? (Please check ALL that apply.)

Lack of energy or physical endurance _____
Conflict with job responsibilities _____
Family obligations including housework and childcare _____
Non-supportive family attitudes _____
Inconvenient class times _____
Irrelevant required courses _____
Distance to school _____
Cost of transportation _____
Lack of adequate transportation _____
Cost of childcare _____
Difficulty in meeting school-related expenses _____
Negative experience with instructor _____
Negative experience with program staff _____
Lack of academic counseling _____
Lack of career counseling _____
Lack of self-confidence _____
Lack of direction or purpose _____
Guilt about spending money on school _____
Guilt about neglect of children _____
Loneliness _____
Lack of specific skills and abilities _____
Rusty study skills _____
Personal illness, family illness _____
Pregnancy _____
Other _____

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT CHANGES THAT SOMETIMES OCCUR WHEN WOMEN RETURN TO SCHOOL.

11. Have your reasons for being in school changed since you have returned to school?

Yes _____ No _____

(If yes) In what ways have they changed? _____

_____

_____

What do you think caused them to change? _____

_____

_____

12. Have your career goals changed since you have returned to school?

Yes _____ No _____

(If yes) In what ways have they changed? _____

_____

_____

What do you think caused them to change? _____

_____

_____

13. Have your feelings about yourself changed since you returned to school?

Yes _____ No _____

(If yes) In what ways have they changed? _____

_____

_____

What do you think caused them to change? _____

_____

_____

14. Has the way you relate to other people changed since you returned to school?

Yes _____ No _____

(If yes) In what ways has it changed? _____

_____

_____

What do you think caused it to change? _____

_____

_____

15. Have your priorities (for example, family responsibilities, social life, housekeeping, community involvement) changed since you have returned to school?

Yes _____ No _____

(If yes) In what ways have they changed? _____

_____

_____

What do you think caused them to change? _____

_____

_____

16. Has your interest in community activites (such as political, civic or religious activities) changed since you have returned to school?

Yes _____ No _____

(If yes) In what ways has it changed? _____

_____

_____

What do you think caused it to change? _____

_____

_____

17. How many re-entry students are you friends with? _____

18. Besides going to class, which of the following do you do with other re-entry students?

Study _____ Share transportation _____

Socialize between classes _____ Share childcare _____

Have coffee or lunch _____ Share living arrangements _____

Go to social events _____ Other _____

19. To what extent have you been able to use the knowledge from your life experiences in your classes? (Please CIRCLE the number which is most appropriate.)

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very much

20. If you have taken courses on women, (such as sociology, history, etc.) did you think they were:

A waste of time 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely useful

21. To what extent do you feel affected by women's liberation?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 Very much

22. Have you ever felt discriminated against on the basis of:

Race _____ Religion _____

Age _____ Physical handicap _____

Sex _____ Sexual orientation _____

National origin _____ Other _____

PART 2

THIS SECTION DEALS WITH YOUR WOMEN'S RE-ENTRY PROGRAM.

23. Are you (or were you) enrolled in the Women's Re-entry Program at your college?

Yes _____ No _____

(If not, please skip to Part 3 on page 9.)

24. How long have you been in the Women's Re-entry Program? _____

25. Check ALL the ways you heard about the Women's Re-Entry Program:

Personal contact with women from the program at your school____
Personal contact with other students at your school_____
Other word of mouth (friends, neighbors, beautician, store clerk, etc)_____
Referral by a social service agency or another college_____
Television_____
Radio_____
Newspaper_____
Brochure, flyer or poster_____
Other_____

26. Of the above, which ONE was most important in your decision to look into the Women's Re-entry Program?

Personal contact with women from the program at your school____
Personal contact with other students at your school_____
Other word of mouth (friends, neighbors, beautician, store clerk, etc)_____
Referral by a social service agency or another college_____
Television_____
Radio_____
Newspaper_____
Brochure, flyer or poster_____
Other_____

27. As far as you are aware, which of the following services does your Women's Re-entry Program offer? Which have you used at least once?

	services offered	services used
Women's Re-entry Program office	_____	_____
Women's Center	_____	_____
Information Center (such as a Re-entry Program bulletin board or black-board, or a program secretary)	_____	_____
Pre-admission counseling	_____	_____
Academic counseling	_____	_____
College credit for life experiences	_____	_____
Re-entry Women's counselor (on the program staff at least part time)	_____	_____
College counselor specializing in counseling re-entry women	_____	_____
Peer counseling	_____	_____
Tutoring, study sessions	_____	_____
Block course scheduling	_____	_____
Night classes	_____	_____
Orientation or Guidance class	_____	_____
Refresher course in study skills	_____	_____
Referral to a learning center or a class to upgrade skills	_____	_____
Child care	_____	_____
Financial aid counseling	_____	_____
Financial assistance for qualifying students	_____	_____
Vocational counseling	_____	_____
Job placement	_____	_____
College or university placement	_____	_____
Referrals to social services	_____	_____
Car pool arrangements	_____	_____
Information about health services	_____	_____
Information about legal advice	_____	_____
Any other services not mentioned?		
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

28. In general, how satisfied are you with the Re-entry Program?

Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	Very satisfied

29. Have you ever considered dropping out of the Re-entry Program?

Yes_____ No_____

If yes, why? _____

_____

30. On the basis of your experience, what changes would you like to see in the Women's Re-entry Program?

_____

_____

_____

_____

PART 3

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

31. How old were you on your last birthday? _____

32. Are you currently:

Single (never married) _____ Separated _____

Married (once only) _____ Divorced _____

Married (remarried) _____ Widowed _____

Other _____

33. Are you the head of a household?

Yes _____ No _____

34. If you are married, please answer the following questions:

A. What is the highest level of education your husband has completed?

Eighth grade or less _____ Some college _____

Some high school _____ A.A. degree _____

High school diploma _____ Bachelor's degree ___

Technical or business school ____ Graduate degree _____

B. Is your husband presently attending school?

Yes _____ No _____

C. What is your husband's principal occupation?

_____

35. What is the highest level of education your parents completed?

	Mother	Father
Eighth grade or less	_____	_____
Some high school	_____	_____
High school diploma	_____	_____
Technical or business school	_____	_____
Some college	_____	_____
A.A. degree	_____	_____
Bachelor's degree	_____	_____
Graduate degree	_____	_____

36. Did your mother work before you were 18?

Yes _____ No _____

37. Has your mother ever been a re-entry woman?

Yes _____ No _____

38. What are (or were) your parents' major occupations?

Mother _____

Father _____

39. How many children do you have? _____

40. What are your children's ages? _____

41. Are you presently employed outside your home?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, what is your present occupation, besides student?

_____

Are you working: Full-time _____ Part-time _____

42. What was your major occupation before you returned to school?

_____

43. If you were working outside the home before you re-entered school, was it: Full-time _____ Part-time _____

44. How concerned are you about your ability to finance your education? (Please check the statement that applies best.)

I am confident that I will have enough money _____

I am somewhat concerned, but I will probably have enough money _____

I am not sure I will have enough money to complete my education _____

I definitely will not be able to complete my education for financial reasons _____

45. What is your approximate yearly family income?

under $5000 _____ $14000 to $20000 _____

$5000 to $9000 _____ $20000 to $30000 _____

$9000 to $14000 _____ over $30000 _____

46. Please number in order of importance the sources of your family's income? (For the most important or only source, mark 1, for the next most important, mark 2, and so on.)

Own employment _____

Husband's employment _____

Parent's employment _____

Employment of other relatives _____

Scholarship or grant _____

Work/study job _____

Loan _____

Welfare _____

G.I. Benefits _____

Social Security benefits _____

Other _____

47. Which of the following groups do you consider yourself a member of?

Asian/Asian-American _____

Black _____

Chicana/Latina/Mexican-American _____

Native American _____

White _____

Other (please specify) _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES
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